

ARTICLE APPEARED
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WASHINGTON POST
3 December 1986

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Turkish Leader Backs Iran Initiative

Turkish Prime Minister Turgut Ozal disagrees with President Reagan's secret arms deals with Iran, but supports the president's aborted effort to establish at least some relations with the radical Moslem state. Ozal also indicated that Turkey is unlikely to follow Britain's lead and break relations with Syria, even though Turkish intelligence is reasonably certain that the Syrians have helped Armenian terrorists who have been slaughtering Turkish diplomats and their families round the world. Solid proof of Syria's complicity is needed before such action would be taken against Turkey's southern neighbor, Ozal said.

The prime minister was interviewed in Istanbul by Dale Van Atta. Ozal's observations on the 6-year-old war between Iran and Iraq were particularly significant because Turkey tries to maintain relations with both antagonists, which abut Turkey on the east and southeast.

Ozal revealed that he and other Turkish officials have secretly offered their services as "honest broker" to bring an end to the costly Persian Gulf war, which threatens to engulf the Middle East. Though it has greater trade with Iraq, Turkey has remained officially neutral in the war.

Choosing his words carefully, as befits a personable, diplomatic politician, Ozal said of Reagan: "He is a very good man." He then agreed that the secret sale of arms to Iran was bad policy.

However, Ozal added that he has maintained many contacts with various Iranians, and believes the United States should do likewise. "Iranians in general are good people," he said. "You cannot omit

Iran. It is a big country—much bigger than Turkey—and there are very big resources in Iran."

The Turkish prime minister suggested that there is still a reservoir of good will in Iran toward Americans. He said this is especially true among U.S.-educated Iranians, even some in Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's regime.

"But to start something is essential," Ozal said. "In one way or another, you have to establish some kind of diplomatic relations. You cannot omit Iran. Ignore it? No, you can't."

How about Turkey's decision to "omit" Syria's support for terrorism?

"Terrorism is a different matter," Ozal said. "I think all our countries should join hand in hand to fight terrorists. But it is very difficult to come together. There is a saying in Turkish: 'A snake that doesn't touch us, let him live; let him live a thousand years.'"

When he was reminded that U.S. intelligence reports link Syria to the Armenian terrorists, Ozal took a brief historical detour. He noted that in the late 1970s, when internal violence between the left and the right in Turkey threatened civil war, Turkish intelligence reports implicated Syria as a source of training and support for leftist extremists. In fact, he said, he and Turkish diplomats had talked with the Syrians about those allegations as recently as the first of this year.

"They flatly objected to all these points," Ozal recalled. "They said that they were not true. And it is very difficult to find real proof [that they are true]."